



National Association of Social Workers / Connecticut Chapter

2139 Silas Deane Highway
Suite 205
Rocky Hill, CT 06067
(860) 257-8066

Kurt Fuchs, LCSW, President
Stephen A Karp, MSW, Executive Director
naswct@naswct.net

Testimony on HB 7027: AAC the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June Thirtieth 2019 and Making
Appropriations Therefor
Appropriations Committee
Department of Public Health Budget
February 23, 2017

Submitted by: Stephen Karp, LMSW

The National Association of Social Workers, CT chapter opposes the Governor's proposed budget reduction of 10% in the Department of Public Health's budget for school based health clinics, \$921,000 in each fiscal year. SBHC's are a proven effective service system that provides physical, mental and in some clinics dental care to children who would otherwise go without health care services. Programs that are working as intended and include preventative measures that save the state dollars should not face reductions in appropriations.

According to the National Mental Health Association, less than 1 in 5 of the 12.5 million children in need of mental health services actually receive them. Many of these children will not achieve academic success due to social, emotional and behavioral problems affecting school performance. SBHC's help these students through means of prevention, early identification, intervention, counseling and support. Especially in both urban and rural communities where many families do not have access to affordable mental health care it is the SBHC's clinical social worker or other mental health provider that meets the child's mental health needs.

For many students the SBHC is the only health and mental health service available to them. Comprehensive SBHC's offer mental health treatment, address acute conditions, provide preventive medical exams, treat injuries, offer oral health care, provide follow-up on chronic conditions and offer health education. Other SBHCs are mental health focused, working with children to cope with the stresses and behavioral issues that impede their ability to learn within the classroom setting. These are services that benefit the student, the student's family, teachers and the school system by having a healthier student body.

Today there are more than 96 SBHCs in 26 communities, providing services to over 44,000 students annually, with a significant percentage of these visits for mental health. A loss of 10% in funding will greatly hamper the work of the SBHCs and put pressure on other community based mental health services that are already stretched beyond capacity for children's mental health.

Schools do not function in a vacuum. When students cross that school door they bring with them the life stresses of their family, impacts of poverty, trauma of witnessing violence, fears of being bullied, chronic and acute health problems, and in this economy where so many families are struggling to get by all of the concerns that a student's family faces press on the student's mind. All of these factors are obstacles to learning. All of these obstacles are brought into the classroom. The medical and behavioral staff of SBHC's breaks through these barriers by providing students with a safe place to seek care within the school. This in turn allows students to return to the classroom ready to be productive in their educational learning.

School based health clinics support student health and student learning. They enhance the funds spent on education by assisting students to succeed in school. We strongly urge that at minimum current funding levels be maintained.